***The Love Epidemic***

*In the days prior to the performance the audience are emailed the following:*

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| Dear Mr. Dominic Hingorani,  I am writing to inform you that you have been deemed as being at risk of having contracted Amoriseamia. You are therefore required by law to attend an appointment at the Eros Clinic at 6.30pm on December 11th.  The clinic is located in the building that was previously University Square Stratford. The address is: 1 Salway Rd, London E15 1NF. Upon arrival please make your way to reception and ask for the Eros clinic. Staff will direct you to the waiting area which is situated on the third floor.  Please note the Eros Clinic will not be open to you until 5 minutes before your appointment. Should you arrive at University Square Stratford early then please wait on the 3rd floor. The waiting room is clearly signposted from the lifts and stairs.  Prior to your appointment you are strongly advised to not engage in any activity that may put another person at risk of falling in love with you.  Kind regards,  Brenda Sharman  Chief Medical Officer |

*Upon arrival the audience sign in at the main reception for the university. The reception team have been briefed to expect audience members asking for the Eros clinic. They direct them to the 3rd floor. Throughout the piece the audience will be treated as medical patients. Amongst the audience is an actress playing the character of Julia, who the audience will not understand is played by an actor until later in the piece. In the initial stages she will behave exactly as if another audience member. Julia is an idealistic and articulate woman in her early-20’s. Prone to self-examine, her shy exterior belies an adventurous spirit.*

*When the audience reach the 3rd floor signs will direct them towards the Eros clinic. The corridor outside of the main space has been transformed into a waiting area. Perhaps it resembles the reception of a sexual health clinic. There are two distinct areas, one for men and one for women, which are demarked by signs. Posters with government health warnings regarding a disease called Amoriseamia are highly visible. Behind a raised shuttered screen sits a receptionist – Mark – who is also a Health Advisor at the clinic. Mark, who worked at the clinic whilst it was still a sexual health clinic, is kind by nature. But he is struggling because his instincts to nurture are suppressed by the oppressive nature of the Medical Enforcement Agency for whom he now works. When the actors are addressing the audience the dialogue will be of an improvisatory nature – but suggestions are offered here.*

Mark: Hi. Can I help you there? *(potential audience response)* What time was your

(suggested) appointment? *(potential audience response)* Can I take your name please? *(likely audience response)*

*Mark ticks their name off a list.*

Mark: Would you mind just completing the following questionnaire. If you can hand it back to

(suggested) me once completed and then take a seat in the male/female *(as appropriate)* waiting area. We call you when ready. Please remember do not have any sustained eye contact with the other patients and touching is strictly prohibited.

*The audience completes and returns the following questionnaire as instructed:*

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| **Eros Clinic**  **Initial Assessment Procedure: Potentially Infected Persons**  Name:  Date of Birth:  Email:  Please circle as appropriate:   1. Have you hugged another person in the last week? YES NO 2. Have you held hands with another person in the last month? YES NO 3. Can you remember having sustained eye contact with anybody   in the past three days who you deemed sexually attractive? YES NO   1. Have you engaged in flirtatious behavior with a stranger in the   last week? YES NO   1. Have you given your phone number to a stranger in the last month   for non work-related purposes? YES NO   1. Have you sent a digital message to a new acquaintance in last month   that ended with two or more kisses and/or a smiley emoticon? YES NO   1. In the last month have you met another person for a drink, dinner or   other social activity that might be described a date? YES NO   1. Have you engaged in any extended digital conversations (through   texting, Whatsapp, Facebook or other social media) with a new  acquaintance in the last month? YES NO   1. Have you kissed anybody on the lips in the last 24 hours? YES NO 2. Have you lied in any of the preceding questions to protect your   privacy? YES NO |

*Once the audience have all completed their questionnaires Mark moves continues.*

Mark: Thank you for your patience ladies and gentleman. The Agency Officers are now ready for you. Would you mind making your way into the quarantine centre.

*The audience enter the main space. Inside the walls have been concealed by a white marquee – we are inside a makeshift medical centre, such as those we might see in West Africa hurriedly erected to combat Ebola. A large projector screen is visible, and in front of it are rows of seats for the audience. Again there are separate areas for men and women. Two medical treatment tables are visible – one on each side of the space. There is a control console for the projector and lights. We hear a soundscape of medical equipment gently pulsating.*

*Two agents of the Medical Enforcement Agency – dressed in facemasks, surgical gowns and gloves – greet them as they arrive. Agency Officer 1 deals with the men, Agency Officer 2 the women.*

*Agency Officer 1 is male, in his late 20’s and has something of the BNP supporter about him. You feel that prior to the epidemic he might have been a football hooligan, one of the troubled underclass. He has used the political fallout of the epidemic to seize some power over others. He wields that power in a troublesome way: he is aggressive, confrontational and cruel.*

*Agency Officer 2 is female, in her mid-20’s. Outwardly polite and caring she can be unsettling to be around. The proximity to so much death has frayed her nerves. She can be cold and detached.*

Agency Officer 1: Right. You are now in quarantine.

(suggested) Gents keep to the left.

No eye contact please gents.

Look at the floor.

Let’s hurry it along there gents.

Take a seat in the viewing area – left-hand section only.

Agency Officer 2: Can I just ask you to stand up please ladies.

(suggested) You are entering a quarantine zone now.

Don’t look at me directly please.

If you wouldn’t mind keeping to the right.

No sustained eye contact please pet.

Take a seat in the right hand seats please.

*Once the audience are all seated, Agency Officer 1 continues as Agency Officer 2 heads to the operating consol.*

Agency Officer 1: Thank you Debbie. We will now play you a government health broadcast by the Commissioner. Once the lights have faded it will be safe to look at the screen.

*The lights fade and the following government health broadcast is screened on the projector:*

The Commissioner: Good evening citizens. And welcome.

Straight away: let me address your concerns. Let me reach out to you. Officers of the Medical Enforcement Agency have summoned you here tonight because you are at risk. You are at risk of having contracted Amoriseamia – the most deadly disease in the history of mankind.

Dying of Amoriseamia is one of the cruelest deaths a human being can endure –as one by one your internal organs haemorrage. Our most able scientists and clinicians have worked tirelessly to understand the full nature of this terrible disease. After 32 millions deaths in the UK alone - we are still no nearer a cure. Yet my brave and loyal citizens we now know how this awful disease is contracted: by falling in love with an infected person.

Tonight – on my direct orders - you will be tested rigorously by Agency officers for signs that you have fallen in love with another human being. I expect you to be fully compliant with their instructions and tests.

Remember:

Kindness is Cruelty

Affection is Murder

Love is Hatred

Long live the uninfected.

*Lights up.*

Agency Officer 1: Ok ladies and gents. I am now gonna hand you over to my colleague Debbie whose gonna explain the test procedure. Debbie…

Agency Officer 2: Hi again. Well we are going to ask you to take your own DNA test. It’s really straightforward. Can you not me look me in the eye please. Thank you. You simply take one these swabs, run it on the inside of your cheek, *(she demonstrates this)*, pop it into the jiffy bag with your name on it, then hand it either myself or Gavin. If you then take a seat in the waiting room we will have your test result in a couple of minutes. Remember there’s no need to panic.

Agency Officer 1: Ok then - let’s get started. Gents if you want to come with me.

Agency Officer 2: Ladies this way please. Do remember to avoid sustained eye contact if you can.

*The Agency Officers lead the men and women to their respective tables where there are swabs and*

*named plastic bags awaiting them. The audience carry out the test as instructed – with guidance from*

*the Agency Officers where necessary.*

Agency Officer 1: Lets hurry this along gents.

(suggested) Find the bag with your name on it. The swabs are here.

Quick swipe then slip it in the jiffy bag.

Yeah just a quick wipe on the inside of your cheek.

Once your done take a quick seat in the waiting room.

Agency Officer 2: Ok ladies here we go.

(suggested) There should be a bag with your name on pet.

Just run the swab on the inside of your cheek. That’s it.

If you pop it in the bag and then I’ll take it for you.

Once your all done if you want to wait outside in the waiting area we’ll be out in a sec with your results.

Thanks pet.

*Once their test is completed, one by one the audience reseat themselves in the waiting area. Mark is*

*nowhere to be seen. After a minute or so the Agency Officers come out from the quarantine zone.*

Agency Officer 1: Can I have your attention please. Debbie and I have looked at all the samples and I’m afraid one of the tests has responded. So I’m going to need you all to see one of Health Advisors who will be able to advise you of the results. This way please.

*The Agency Officers lead the audience a short walk down the corridor. They are ushered through the door.*

*We are now in Mark’s office. This is a consultancy room where the infected are taken to receive their diagnosis. It is bright, white, clinical and oppressively small. There is a small table with a chair on either side. The audience are left alone for a couple of minutes and then Mark enters.*

Mark: Sorry to have kept you all waiting. It’s a little hectic here today.

*He sits.*

Mark: Is there a Julia Craven here?

Julia: That’s me.

Mark: Great. If you would like to take a seat Julia.

*She sits.*

Mark: My name’s Mark – I’m one of the Health Advisors here. Can I just take your date of birth please?

Julia: It’s the fourth of the tenth ninety-one.

Mark: Thank you. Now Julia, I am going to start by talking you through your test result. Has anyone explained to you what the implications of a positive test are?

Julia: No. Not really.

Mark: Ok. Well as you probably know, Amoriseamia is a particularly aggressive virus. It is … unfortunately … deadly in 90% of cases.

Do you understand what I’m saying Julia?

Julia: Yes… I do.

Mark: Good.

I’m very sorry Julia but your test has come back positive. *(A pause).* I can appreciate what a shock this must be. Can I get you some water or something?

Julia: No I’m fine. Thank you.

Mark: I understand from my colleague that you may have contracted the disease from a … *(he checks his notes) …* Mr. Jonathan Bennett.

Julia: Yes … that’s right.

Mark: Are there are any other contacts who you think you may have infected subsequently?

*(Julia shakes her head ‘no’ to this).*

Mark: Thank you Julia. Finally … I am required to tell you by law that it is now a criminal offence for you – as a person diagnosed with Amoriseamia – to pursue a romantic relationship with another person. We will of course do all we can to support you in the coming months – but I hope you will appreciate we have a duty to protect the uninfected.

Julia: Yes. Yes - I understand.

Mark: Now Julia. There is some paperwork we are going to need to complete. I’ll give you a few moments to yourself.

*Mark exits. There is a long pause. Julia talks to the audience.*

Julia: People say your life flashes before you when you know you’re going to die. That happened to me, in those next five minutes. My life to that point was a trail of silver memories and bitter regrets. Kissing my first boyfriend in the autumn rain. Chasing a forgotten lover down a Caribbean beach. A last tearful outside a busy station. Jonathan in his hospital bed.

As the months passed I began to heal. But it is a heavy thing … knowing all that cannot be. That you will never feel a child growing inside of you. That your mother won’t ever see you marry. But please do not think me ungrateful. I am one of the few people to have survived this awful disease. And for that I am painfully grateful. So I’m learning to stop. And breath. And treasure every moment that is gifted to me. Because when you stop and think …

*The lights snap out plunging the room into blackness.*

…. it could have been all so different.